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CHILDREN OF RETURNED PRISONERS OF WAR:  
ARE THERE REALLY SECOND GENERATIONAL EFFECTS?

D. S. NICE

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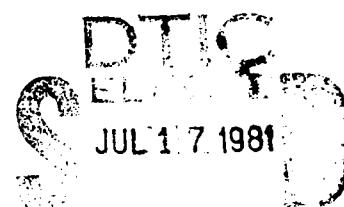
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Children of Returned Prisoners of War:  
Are There Really Second Generational Effects?\*

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Naval Health Research Center



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### Children of Returned

### Children of Returned Prisoners of War:

## Are There Really Second Generational Effects?

Upon the return of the American prisoners of war from Vietnam Dahl and McCubbin (1975) initiated an ambitious longitudinal program to investigate the effects of prolonged, war-induced father absence on child adjustment. In most cases, the absence was temporary but protracted, voluntary (in military service) but involuntary (in captivity), and socially acceptable but not personally acceptable. This unusual pattern of father absence provided Dahl and McCubbin (1975) a unique opportunity to contribute to the important, but rather limited, literature concerning the effects of war-induced separation. In an initial study of the children of the repatriated Prisoners of War (RPWs) one year following the return of their fathers from Vietnam, Dahl and McCubbin (1975) concluded that as a group the RPW children's scores on the California Test of Personality (CTP) (Thorpe, et al., 1953) were uniformly below the norms in Total Personal Adjustment, Total Social Adjustment, and overall Total Adjustment.

This significant finding invited replication for a number of reasons. First, the literature regarding the effects of the POW experience is extremely limited. Therefore, each contribution may have a disproportionately large impact on future theoretical and empirical work. In the original presentation of this report (Dahl

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and McCubbin, 1975), the authors were keenly aware of this potential impact and were careful to comment on the need for replication with an appropriate control group. However, numerous citations (cf. Dahl, et. al., 1977; McCubbin, et al., 1976a, b; McCubbin, 1976; Dahl et al., 1976; Segal et al., 1976; McCubbin et al., 1975) and a subsequent publication of the original results (McCubbin and Dahl, 1976) carry no such caution.

A second inducement for replication is that test norms become obsolete. As Cronbach (1970) pointed out, "whatever reference group is used for test norms, they are sooner or later rendered irrelevant by social changes" (Chronbach, 1970: 112). The CTP norms, established in 1953, have been in existence for almost a quarter of a century and should be used only in conjunction with an appropriate control group.

A third reason for replication stems from certain statistical considerations. Since normative means were not available, Dahl and McCubbin (1975) compared RPW mean scores with normative medians in the numerator of multiple, one-tailed, t tests. This comparison of means with medians may be problematic, however, since a number of CTP subscales (e.g. Sense of Personal Worth, Nervous Symptoms, and Family Relations) have skewed distributions (Cronbach, 1970: 557). As the degree of skewness, or asymmetry, of the distribution increases, the expected value of the mean begins to deviate from the median. Therefore, the interpretation of mean-median differences becomes difficult when the distributions are not normal.

A final issue concerning the importance of replicating the Dahl and McCubbin (1975) study relates to the delicate interface between these findings and the people these findings represent. The RPWs from Vietnam and their families represent a small and highly visible subset of the military. In order to minimize the probability of generating spurious stereotypes, research conducted on the RPW sample should be both statistically conservative and repeatable. The purpose of the present study is to explore further the Dahl and McCubbin (1975) findings with the addition of an appropriately matched control group.

#### Method

##### Subjects

The original Dahl and McCubbin study was based upon the CTP test results of 99 children. These children were drawn from a sample of 43 families randomly selected from a population of 241 RPW families. This sample consisted of 32 Navy families, 9 Army families, and 2 Marine Corps families. In the present study, 27 of the original 32 Navy RPW families were included. The remaining five Navy RPW families were not included because (a) their children now exceeded the upper age limit of the California Test of Personality (four families), or (b) they declined to participate in the study (one family). In order to increase the sample size, seven additional Navy RPW families were randomly selected.

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Each of the 34 Navy RPW families was matched with a control family on a number of important variables. Funds were not available to establish a control group for the Army or Marine Corps families. All RPWs were naval officers in aviation and were matched with a control who was (a) flying missions in Vietnam at approximately the same time that the RPW was captured and became a POW, and (b) was of approximately the same military rank as the RPW at both the time of capture and the present. In addition, controls were matched on the basis of the number, age, and sex of children. The sample of RPW's children consisted of 45 males, and 25 females (mean age 12-7, range 5-5 to 17-10). The control sample was composed of 48 males, and 26 females (mean age 10-3, range 4-11 to 18-7). The RPW and control families lived in a variety of areas throughout the Untied States; however, the majority were located in California, Virginia, and Florida. In the RPW group the mean period of father absence due to captivity was 4.54 years.

### Measures

Participant children were administered the appropriate level of the CTP, Form AA, according to their grade levels. Twenty-eight children (10 RPW and 18 control) were given the primary level (grades kindergarten through three); 47 children (23 RPW and 24 control) were given the elementary level (grades four through seven); 34

children (16 RPW and 18 control) were given the intermediate level (grades eight and nine); and 35 children (21 RPW and 14 control) were given the secondary level (grades ten through twelve). The CTP consists of a Total Personal Adjustment Scale, composed of six subscales; a Total Social Adjustment Scale, composed of six subscales; and a Total Adjustment Scale, which is the sum of the Personal and Social Adjustment Scales.

#### Procedure

As in the original study, the mother of each participant child was contacted and an appointment was scheduled at the family's convenience. All CTP data were collected in the home as part of an annual family follow-up. These interviews took place between September 1976 and May 1977, approximately two years after the original Dahl and McCubbin investigation and approximately four years after the father's return.

#### Results

In order to examine the differences between the RPW and control children, on each of the four levels of the CTP, multiple t-tests for independent samples were computed on each of the 12 subscales as well as the cumulative Social, Personal, and Total Adjustment Scales. As in the original study, the t-tests were one-tailed and  $\alpha$  was set at the .05 level. Although this statistical convention is far from conservative, it was maintained for the purpose of replication. As shown in Table 1, there were no significant differences between the

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Insert Table 1 about here  
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RPW and control children on any of the scales at any level of the CTP. In fact, 34 of the 45 comparisons revealed that the RPW Children had slightly higher adjustment scores than the controls. Using a sign test, the scores of the RPW children were greater than the controls in a significant number of the comparisons ( $p < .001$ ).

These results suggested several possible reasons for the lack of replication, (a) the RPW children were deficient in personal and social adjustment in 1974 but have improved significantly over the past two years, (b) military children are generally below average in personal and social adjustment, or (c) the CTP norms, established in 1953 and used in the Dahl and McCubbin (1975) study, are outdated and no longer useful.

In order to address the first alternative, comparisons were made to determine whether the RPW children's scores on the CTP had changed significantly between the 1974 and the 1976 collection periods. Results indicated that between 1974 and 1976, the RPW children as a group did not change significantly on either the Social,  $t(167) = 1.27, p > .05$ , Personal,  $t(167) = 1.20, p > .05$ , or Total,  $t(167) = 1.29, p > .05$ , adjustment scales of the CTP. Additional analyses indicated no significant differences between the 1974 CTP scores of the RPW children and the 1976 CTP scores of the control children on the Social,  $t(171) = .36, p > .05$ , Personal,  $t(171) = .41, p > .05$ , or Total  $t(171) = .03, p > .05$  adjustment scales.

Analyses of the differences between the CTP scores of the control children and the normative CTP scores used in the Dahl and McCubbin (1975) study revealed that, like the RPW children, mean scores of the control children were significantly below the norm medians in the realm of Social,  $t(73) = 3.46$ ,  $p < .001$ , Personal,  $t(73) p < .02$ , and Total,  $t(73) = 2.77$ ,  $p < .01$ , adjustment. In order to explore the possibility that military children are uniquely below average in adjustment, the CTP scores of an appropriate civilian cohort were identified in the literature (Maw & Maw, 1975).

In the study selected as a civilian comparison, Maw and Maw (1975) investigated the relationship between the Social Adjustment and curiosity of fifth-grade children. The six subscales of the Social Adjustment portion of the CTP were among the dependent measures administered to the 200 fifth-grade boys and girls who participated in the study.<sup>1</sup> As shown in Table 2, t tests revealed that the

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Insert Table 2 about here  
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<sup>1</sup>The sample of children used in the Maw and Maw (1975) study was taken largely from families of middle socioeconomic status. There were no children in this study with IQs low enough to meet the State of Delaware's admission standard for special classes for the educable and the trainable. With permission of the authors, the boys' and girls' CTP scores of the high and low curiosity groups were pooled and compared with the normative CTP data.

mean scores of these civilian fifth-graders were significantly below the norm medians on each of the six subscales of Social Adjustment as well as the Total Social Adjustment Scale of the CTP.

#### Discussion

In the course of an attempt to replicate the Dahl and McCubbin (1975) study, it was discovered that the Social and Personal Adjustment of the RPW children was not significantly different from the Social and Personal Adjustment of a matched control group. The most parsimonious explanation for this unexpected result seemed to be that over the past two years the RPW children had improved significantly in their Social and Personal Adjustment. The possibility also exists that sample differences between the original study and the present study may have biased the results. A re-examination of the 1974 RPW children's data, however, revealed no significant differences from either the 1976 RPW children's data or the control children's data.

Since the failure to replicate did not appear to be related to differences between the 1974 and 1976 RPW children's data, attention was directed to the CTP norms which were used in the Dahl and McCubbin (1975) study. A comparison of the normative data and the CTP scores of the control children indicated that, like the RPW children, controls were significantly below the norms in Personal and Social Adjustment. In order to investigate the possibility that military children were uniquely below average in adjustment, the CTP data from a cohort of civilian fifth-graders was compared with the CTP

Social Adjustment norms. These civilian fifth-graders were also found to be significantly below the normative data. These results indicate that the mean CTP scores of fairly diverse groups of children are significantly below the normative medians.

In addition to the apparently problematic nature of CTP normative comparisons, the content of the CTP appears to be somewhat dated. A number of children in the present study had difficulty understanding questions which included words such as "mixer" and "quarrel." A similar concern was noted by Parker (1974) who reported that although the CTP was read to the subjects, the questions seemed to be interpreted ambiguously and required a great deal of attention and concentration. In view of these factors, Parker (1974) expressed doubts about the validity of the subjects' responses to the CTP.

Such concerns about the current validity of the CTP and, in particular, about the meaningfulness of normative comparisons, require a re-evaluation of the Dahl and McCubbin (1975) conclusion that RPW children exhibit significantly greater difficulty with their adjustment than the norm. This re-evaluation is of particular concern since the original finding represents an important basis of subsequent studies and conclusions (McCubbin, et al., 1976a; Dahl, et al., 1976, 1977).

Although the RPW children did not differ significantly from the control children on the California Test of Personality, the effects

of prolonged father absence may be manifest in a number of other areas of development. Research is currently underway to examine the RPW and control children in areas such as locus of control, achievement, health, and perceptions of parents and family environment. It is hoped that such research may yield a more comprehensive picture of the effects of temporary, but prolonged, father absence on child development. Until these data are collected, however, it would appear prudent to guard against the Type III error which Herzog and Sudia (1971) define as "the erroneous belief that available evidence is adequate to support a firm and generalizable conclusion" (Herzog and Sudia, 1971: 91).

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TABLE 1  
Mean Comparison of Each RPW Group  
with its Matched Control

CPI Level	CPI Scale	RPW	Control	CPI Scale		CPI Scale	RPW	Control
				Primary (N=28)	Intermediate (N=34)			
Primary (N=28)	Self-reliance	6.6	5.9	1.16		Self-reliance	9.9	10.3
	Personal worth	6.4	6.1	0.55		Personal worth	10.9	11.6
	Personal freedom	6.5	6.0	0.75		Personal freedom	10.6	11.0
	Belonging	6.5	5.9	0.84		Belonging	12.1	13.2
	Withdrawal tendencies	6.4	5.4	1.30		Withdrawal tendencies	8.7	9.5
	Nervous symptoms	5.4	5.9	-0.68		Nervous symptoms	11.1	11.1
	Total Personal	37.8	35.2	0.85		Total Personal	63.1	67.4
	Social standards	6.3	6.4	-0.24		Social standards	12.6	12.7
	Social skills	5.4	5.8	-0.87		Social skills	10.5	10.4
	Antisocial tendencies	6.9	6.2	1.20		Antisocial tendencies	11.2	10.2
	Family relations	6.7	5.8	1.50		Family relations	10.8	11.9
	School relations	7.1	7.2	-0.30		School relations	10.3	10.7
	Community relations	6.6	6.8	-0.34		Community relations	11.3	12.9
	Total Social	39.0	38.1	0.48		Total Social	63.0	63.0
	TOTAL	76.8	73.3	0.75		TOTAL	129.2	136.3
Elementary (N=47)	Self-reliance	8.0	8.17	-0.38		Secondary (N=35)	10.3	9.85
	Personal worth	9.8	8.8	1.35		Personal worth	12.4	11.6
	Personal freedom	9.5	9.1	0.64		Personal freedom	12.5	12.1
	Belonging	10.2	10.6	-0.62		Belonging	12.7	12.0
	Withdrawal tendencies	8.6	8.8	-0.33		Withdrawal tendencies	11.3	9.9
	Nervous symptoms	8.4	8.4	-0.03		Nervous symptoms	11.6	10.1
	Total Personal	54.5	53.6	0.30		Total Personal	72.0	66.5
	Social standards	10.5	9.9	1.40		Social standards	13.1	12.6
	Social skills	9.4	8.9	1.30		Social skills	11.6	11.1
	Antisocial tendencies	8.5	8.3	0.36		Antisocial tendencies	12.2	11.4
	Family relations	9.6	9.6	-0.03		Family relations	11.3	12.2
	School relations	9.9	9.2	1.00		School relations	13.4	10.5
	Community relations	10.3	10.8	-1.00		Community relations	10.4	10.5
	Total Social	57.6	56.6	0.37		Total Social	69.8	68.4
	TOTAL	112.0	110.0	0.39		TOTAL	151.8	144.9

Table 2  
Comparison of civilian 5th grader means with normative  
medians on social adjustment subscales of the CTP

	<u>mean</u>	<u>norm median</u>	<u>t (df=199)</u>
Social Standards	9.68	10.5	-6.14***
Social Skills	8.06	9.0	-5.29***
Anti-Social Tendencies	8.15	10.0	-9.78***
Family Relations	9.01	10.5	-7.97***
School Relations	8.04	9.0	-4.51***
Community Relations	9.48	10.5	-7.92***
Total Social	52.48	60.0	-9.49***

\*\*\* $p < .001$

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20. ABSTRACT (Continue on reverse side if necessary and identify by block number) An attempt was made to replicate the Dahl and McCubbin (1974-1975) finding that the children of American prisoners of war repatriated from Vietnam scored below the California Test of Personality (CTP) norms on social and personal adjustment. Results indicated no significant differences between the RPW children and a matched control group on any of the CTP scales. Further analyses revealed that the control children were also below the CTP norms on social and personal adjustment. The meaningfulness of the original Dahl and McCubbin (1974-1975) findings were also questioned.		

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1975) finding was challenged on the basis that the 1953 normative data were obsolete.

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